

قصيدة ابن البواب في وصف صناعة الخط

A POEM BY THE CALLIGRAPHER IBN AL-BAWWĀB ON THE SCIENCE OF THE PEN, INK, WRITING, AND PAPER

Translated by Mohamed Zakariya

In the name of God, full of mercy to all His creation, full of mercy to His believers. May God grant mercy and peace to His Prophet Muḥammad, his family and companions, all of them.

قال الشيخ ابو الحسن على بن هلال المعروف بابن البواب سامحه الله

The Shaykh, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Hilāl, the scribe of Baghdad, known as Ibn al-Bawwāb, said:

يامن يريد إجادة التحرير / ويروم حسن الخط والتصوير

[1] To you who wishes to excel in writing / and strives for the beauty of calligraphy and the drawing of letters.

إن كان عزمُك في الكتابة صادقا / فارغب إلى مولاك في التيسير

[2] If your resolution to learn calligraphy is genuine, / then beseech your Lord and Master to make it easy.

أَعْدِدْ من الأقلام كل مثقَّفٍ / صُلْبِ مسوغ صياغة التحبير

[3] Prepare from among your pens the straightest and hardest / that will form and shape elegantly with ink,

[4] And when you turn to carve it, strive / when judging the dimensions, for the medium proportion.⁵

[5] Inspect the two ends of the reed and make the cuts for shaping the tip / on the narrower end.

[6] On making the opening cut, make it clean and fair, / not too long or too short.

[7] Similarly, leave a medium amount of pith, / between abundance and paucity.

١ عند المنجد (اعداد) وهو خطأ مطبعي كما ذكر هلال ناجي في نشرته لشرح ابن الوحيد.

٢ عند المنجد (كل مقوم هش) وهي روايه ضعفيه تدحضها النجربه كما ذكر ناجي.

٣ عند الاثري و المنجد (صناعة)

٤ عند المنجد (التحبيري) وهو وهم كما ذكر ناجي.

Commentary of Ibn al-Waḥīd: Do not cut the tip too long or too short.

٦ عند ابن خلدون (والتخضير) و عند الكردي (التحفير) وهو وهم كما ذكر ناجي.

٧ عند ابن خلدون (خلوا عن) و عند الأثري (يخلو عن).

٨ هذا البيت ليس عند ابن خلدون ولا عند الأثرى

والشَقَّ وَسَّطْهُ ليبقى سنُّهُ \ من جانبيه مُشاكلَ التقرير

[8] Split the nib in the middle so the ink will flow / to both sides of the nib and make the letters flow as required.

[9] Practice this operation until you can do it / with the expertise of a skilled physician.

[10] Then turn your attention, all of it, to clipping the tip of the nib / the whole business is in the clipped end.

[11] Do not try to wheedle me into revealing this entirely. / Truly, I withhold this hidden secret of mine.

[12] Nevertheless, the sum of what I say is the fact that it is to be clipped / between straight and very slanted.

١ عند ابن خلدون و الأثري (بريه) و المنجد (سنه).

٢ عند الأثري: حتى إذا اتقنت ذلك كله /إتقان طب بالمواد خبير

٣ عند الاثري (لرأي) وعند المنجد (لسان)

٤ عند ابن خلدون هذا البيت والذي سبقه تدخلا: حتى إذا اتقنت ذلك كله / فالقط فيه جملة التدبير

٥ عند ابن خلدون و الأثري و المنجد (بسره).

٦ هذا البيت اثبته المنجد قبل الذي تقدمه كما ذكر ناجي.

فابذُلْ له منك اجتهاداً كافيا / فعساك تَظْفَرُ منه بالمأثور ْ

[13] Spend sufficient energy on study and experimentation. / Perhaps you will gain success.

[14] Prepare your inkwell with a wad of raw washed silk and ink made from soot, / then adjust its flow with vinegar and the juice of sour grapes.

[15] Then add to it some washed iron oxide pigment / and some arsenic and, as a preservative, some camphor.

[16] When you have finished and bottled the ink, turn your attention / to choosing paper that is clean and smooth and will accept sizing and burnishing.

[17] After cutting it to size, squeeze it in the press / to take away its roughness and susceptibility to change.

[18] After these preparations, make copying good models of calligraphy your patient habit. / No one can reach his hoped for goal except the patient one.

١ عند المنجد (بالمبسور) وعند ابن خلدون و الأثرى لا وجود لهذا البيت كما ذكر ناجي.

٢ عند ابن خلدون و الاثري (حتى اذا ماخمرت) وعند المنجد (حتى اذا اخمرتها).

٣ عند ابن خلدون و الأثري (بالمعصار).

إبدأ به في اللوح أول مرة / فكذاك فعل الماجد النحرير'

[19] At first, practice on a wooden slate board. / That is the method of the bright, experienced teachers.²

[20] Then move on to paper, / drawing forth a determination and renewed zeal to get busy writing.

[21] Bravely put forth your right hand to write / no one obtains his desire like the bold.8

[22] Do not be embarrassed by the ugliness you will write / when you first copy the work of the masters and draw the letters.¹⁰

2 Commentary of Ibn al-Baṣīṣ: He must practice day and night on this. Use of the slate board allows erasing mistakes.

٤ عند المنجد (منتصا).

٦ عند ابن خلدون و الأثرى (عن التشمير)

8 Commentary of Ibn al-Waḥīd: Most people fear their effort will not be successful. This thought will cause cowardice, which will disturb the hand.

10 Commentary of Ibn al-Waḥīd: The weak and ignorant person is ashamed that people will see his shortcomings during his learning

فالأمر يصعُبُ ثم يرجِعُ هيّناً / ولَرُبّ سهْل جاء بعد عسير

[23] This affair will be difficult, but it will get easier. / Behold how many times ease follows hardship.

[24] And when you have reached your desired goal / and you have become a partisan of happiness and joy.²

[25] Then thank your Lord and live as He would like you to. / Truly, God loves all those who are thankful.

[26] Aspire for yourself that your fingers will write only that which is good / so you will leave only goodness behind in this abode of deception.

[27] A person will greet all his actions tomorrow / when he meets his own published book.

stage. Thus he will withdraw from learning due to his arrogance and foolishness and will remain ignorant all his life.

2 Commentary of Ibn al-Baṣīṣ on the desired goal: Master the basic scripts, *muḥaqqaq* and *thuluth* and their related styles.

Translator's Note:

This poem was written in the traditional form called *qaṣida*. Each line is divided into two hemistiches, indicated here by a slash (/). The poem is named for the fact that each line ends in an 'J'='r' sound.

Ibn al-Bawwāb was one of the three primary masters of the Baghdad approach to the concept of proportional styles of Islamic calligraphy. The other two were Ibn Muqla (d. 940) and Yāqūt al-Musta^cṣimī (d. 1298).

Ibn Muqla is considered to have been the first to formulate rules for the basic scripts (*muḥaqqaq*, *thuluth*, *naskh*, etc.). Ibn al-Bawwāb further built up the scripts' edifice of geometry and aesthetics, turning them into scripts of practicality, repeatability, consistency, and beauty.

A man of religious scholarship, a preacher, librarian, and artist, Ibn al-Bawwāb was nevertheless constantly humiliated by the courtiers and dandies of the 'Abbāsid caliphate because of his humble birth. He died in 1022.

Mohamed Zakariya October 2003

Source of English text: http://www.zakariya.net/resources/rhyming_in_r.html Source of Arabic Text: http://sawwan1600.jeeran.com/archive/2008/2/458403.htm and:

النص هناكما ذكر المحقق هلال ناجي في نشرته لشرح ابن الوحيد على رائية ابن البواب ، مطبعة المنار بتونس الحرة لعام ١٩٦٧ وكما وردت ضمن كتاب جامع محاسن كتابة الكُنَّاب لمحمد بن حسن الطيبي ، نشره وقدم له صلاح الدين المنجد ، مطبوعًا من الجهة اليمنى ، ومصورًا من الجهة اليسرى ، حرصًا على نفاسة ما فيه من الخطوط ، بيروت ، ١٩٦٢ م . (٣٦ ص ، م ١٢ ص .)